

## Consumer Scam Alert

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September 6, 2011

### **ADVANCE FEE SCAM USES PHONY NORTH DAKOTA ADDRESS - Towers Lending Source -**

Once again, scam artists are attempting to cash in on North Dakota's good name. The Attorney General's Consumer Protection Division has received complaints from out of state residents about "Towers Lending Source," a phony online company claiming to have an office located at 112 North University Drive in Fargo.

Towers Lending uses phony telephone and e-mail contacts to promote its fake loan "offers" to consumers. In return for payment of an up-front "collateral payment" fee –of several hundred dollars – the consumer is "guaranteed" a loan. The company assures the consumer that once the collateral fee is received, the loan application will be processed and the "guarantee loan funds" will be deposited into the same account as the consumer's voided check.

"The applicant never gets the money, of course, because there is no loan; the company is not real," said Attorney General Wayne Stenehjem.

In its "loan documents," Towers Lending claims to be an organization existing under the laws of the State of North Dakota and even uses a phony 701 area code telephone number (701-335-7096) to try and convince prospective customers that it is located in ND. However, the website for Towers Lending actually originates outside the United States.

"If you have to pay anything up front, it's a scam. It's that simple," said Parrell Grossman, director of the Consumer Protection division.

This variation of the classic advance fee scam also puts the unwitting consumer at risk for theft of funds and identity theft. By completing the phony loan application form and returning it along with the other "required documentation," the consumer not only has given the scam artist direct access to the consumer's bank account, but also has handed over all the personal information necessary for the scam artist to open new credit accounts in the consumer's name.

The Attorney General cautions consumers that a website can be created from any location in the world and does not have to be connected with a real company. Scam artists usually operate outside the United States because it puts them beyond reach of state and federal law enforcement agencies.

The consumer protection division reminds consumers:

- There is no federal or regulatory agency monitoring whether a website is legitimate or operating from within the United States.
- Never respond to an unsolicited telephone call, fax or e-mail offer.

- If you have to pay anything in order to qualify for, hold, or receive the supposed funds, it's a scam.
- Never click on a link within an e-mail. Don't provide personal information such as a date of birth, social security number or bank account numbers in response to an unsolicited telephone, fax or e-mail offer.
- Before considering sending money, call the consumer protection agency in the state the company allegedly operates. Contact information for the state Attorneys General is available at <http://www.ag.nd.gov/QuickLinks/OtherAGs.htm>.
- If you wire money, you cannot get it back. If you send a cashier's check, you cannot cancel the cashier's check. That's why scam artists require you to use those payment methods.

Consumers who have already completed and submitted the loan application to the phony lending company should review the information on Security Freeze/Identity Theft at <http://www.ag.nd.gov/CPAT/SecurityFreeze.htm>, and contact the appropriate agency in their state.

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